

The Power of God-Centred Prayer

What sets God-centred prayer apart from all other kinds? What is the dynamic that makes God-centred prayer a communion of creature with Creator, with visible results? God-centred prayer is the kind God answers, so we must ask – why? What is the power behind God-centred prayer? The answer lies in what we looked at last – the purpose of God-centred prayer – to glorify God. The power of God-centred prayer lies in this same thing – it is prayer that is born in the heart of God, taught to the children of God, made possible by the Son of God, and answered by the good pleasure of God. In it all – God remains the source, the reason, and the answer.

Someone has said that prayer is really God talking to Himself through you. That is exactly what God-centred prayer is, as we will see today. God-centred prayer is powerful because it is the very echo of God's voice.

As such, God-centred prayer is Trinitarian prayer. It involves Father, Son and Spirit. God-centred prayer is prayed to the Father, through Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. In these three we see the blessings of justification, adoption and sanctification.

So the first reason for the power of God-centred prayer is that it is prayed to God the Father.

When replying to the disciple's request that He teach them how to pray, Jesus began His model prayer with the words 'Our Father'. Now that is very significant. You do not see people calling God 'Father' very often in the Old Testament. In fact, we read the following in:

John 5: "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (Joh 5:17-18)

Now when we call God our Father, we are not claiming equality with Him like Jesus was. But we are claiming a unique relationship. We are not merely addressing Him as *the* Father, but as *our* Father. The fact that we have been brought into God's family, and **made His children is because of the blessing of justification**. We now have access into the throne room of God. The power of prayer is not what we make possible through strong emotion; it is what He has made possible in justifying us. We pray to the Father, because we now have this access. The power of prayer consists in the fact that we can directly address the Father – the Creator of the Universe. This is because of justification – of being made sons.

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (Eph 2:18)

"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

(Gal 4:6-7)

God the Father looks at those who have been saved as wearing the righteousness of His Son. Their sins have been imputed to His Son on the cross and have been judged.

God has declared His children ‘not guilty’ and therefore does not deal with us as criminals on probation, but as innocent children.

Justification now means that the all powerful Father seeks to answer favourably those He has declared righteous.

“At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

(Joh 16:26-27)

“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

(Mat 7:9-11)

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

(Luk 12:32)

In other words, the power here is twofold: a Father who is omnipotent; and a Father who is already willing to help His children. The Father is not wrestling a lack of power to help His children, nor is He given to a lack of desire to help His children. We do not have to overcome His reluctance. Because of our justification – God has declared us righteous and now deals with us as children, not as sinners.

By way of illustration, this is not true of the unsaved. The unbeliever cannot address God as Father; therefore his prayer can have no power. The Bible does not teach the universal fatherhood of God – i.e. we are all God’s children. In fact, Jesus Himself taught that unbelievers were children of the devil. Paul calls us children of wrath before we are saved.

Proverbs 15:8 reports: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”

In other words, when the unsaved present a ritualistic display of devotion and prayer, it is a stench to God. The prayer of the unsaved does not please God because it is not, and cannot be God-centred. The first God-centred prayer a man prays is his prayer for salvation – when he turns from self-centredness to Christ-centredness. The verse we looked at last week regarding the purpose of God-centred prayer, Psalm 50:15 has some interesting verse following it:

“And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.” (Psa 50:15-17)

The righteous are to use God-centred prayer for the glory of God. But then God turns to the wicked and says “What do you think you are doing, pretending to mouth words about my Word and my nature, seeing you are self-centred, and despise my Lordship?” It becomes almost a contradiction for the unsaved to pray, because they still cling to their self-sufficiency, their self-satisfaction, and their self-righteousness.

The beginning of God-centeredness takes place when they get saved. That does not mean God cannot answer the prayers of an unsaved man – He may choose to do so, for His own purposes. But there is no power in their prayers, because they are not God-centred. So, we see by contrast, when God is your Father, it makes a huge difference. This is the basis of the power of God-centred prayer – you can pray it to the Father of the Lord Jesus, addressing Him as your own Father.

The second reason for the power of God-centred prayer is that it is prayed in Jesus' name. Now many have got the wrong idea of what it means to pray in Jesus' name. They think it is the signature you sign at the bottom of the prayer that authorises everything that went before. For them, the name of Jesus is almost a superstitious good-luck charm that they add to the prayer, hoping it will give the prayer that extra bit of persuasiveness, and somehow twist God's arm. But this is far from the idea of what it means to pray in His name. Indeed, Jesus mentions in Matthew 7 that there will one day be many before Him on the day of Judgement, who will say,

“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy and cast out demons and do wonderful works in your name?”

And Jesus says He will reply – “Depart from Me, I never knew you.”

It's quite possible to be using the phrase – ‘we pray in Jesus' name’ but be doing nothing of the sort. It is possible to mouth the words ‘in Jesus' name’ but be doing the opposite. So, what does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? We see the first mention of it in John 14:13-14:

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”
(Joh 14:13-14)

Then again in John 16: “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (Joh 16:23-24)

Throughout the Bible, someone's name represents their entire character. Very often you see God changing someone's name after a significant event, to imply something new about them or their relationship with Him. When the Bible tells us to believe on the name of the lord Jesus, it means to believe on who He is – His character. Praising His name is a call to praise who He is, not just the personal pronoun that is His name. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved means whoever will call upon the Person of the Lord shall be saved

When the apostles cast out demons in the name of Jesus, they were calling upon the character, the very Person and authority of Jesus to cast our demons or heal. When the Bible speaks about those who name the name of Jesus; those who carry His name, it means those who identify with His Person, those who represent Him. When God speaks about doing things for His name's sake, He means for His Person, His character, His glory. God's name is a synonym for who He is. So when Jesus says, ‘Pray in my name’, He does not mean, tag on my name to your prayer. He means stand in who I am when you stand before God. The Person of Jesus

Christ – His glory, His righteousness is what we are to stand in when we pray. We must appeal to God on the basis of God's pleasure in His Son. We must hide in the merits of Jesus. **This is the blessing of adoption.**

“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,” (Eph 1:5)

Adoption is where God confers upon us the standing and privileges He gives to His own Son. In Christ He blesses us with every spiritual blessing. God marries us to Christ, so that God's pleasure and kindness to His Son becomes His pleasure and kindness toward His bride. Jesus said the Father is glorified in the Son when we ask in His name. That's because when we come in prayer making the Person and work of Jesus the grounds by which we approach God, He and His work of grace are magnified. Man does not stand before God on His own works. Prayer in Jesus' name magnifies God's grace. It is God-centred.

So we can see that the power here is not that we are using the right chants and phrases, it is because God loves His Son more than anything else and those who are joined to His Son have the privilege of appealing to God in His name. There is a fundamental reality behind this and it is the fact that Jesus is praying for us as our high priest. If He were not doing that, you could not say you prayed in Jesus' name. You could only say that if Jesus Himself represented you. And He does.

Rom 8:34: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (Rom 8:34)

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (1Jo 2:1)

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25)

Christ praying for us means we are truly adopted. And being truly adopted means we are authorised to pray in His name, just as truly adopted children can petition their father as if they were natural-born children. In other words to pray in Jesus' name is what you do when you pray as a believer. An unbeliever cannot pray in Jesus' name, because they have never called on His name.

And that leads us to the third part of the power of God-centred prayer and that is: **it is prayer in the Spirit.** We find this phrase in:

Ephesians 6:18: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”.

Again, we see in Jude: “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,” (Jud 1:20)

What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? Does it mean we are in some sort of semi-trance like state? Does it refer to speaking in tongues? Is it some kind of private prayer language where the Spirit prays through you?

Well, what does the phrase ‘in the Spirit’ refer to in other places? Paul says salvation is beginning in the Spirit. In Gal 3:3, he tells us to walk in the Spirit, to keep in step with the Spirit. In chapter 5, he says we worship God in the Spirit. In Phil 3:3, he says the Colossians loved Him in the Spirit. Each time the meaning seems to be that the Spirit is in control, enabling, filling, guiding. So, as we would expect, prayer in the Spirit is prayer which is enabled by Him and guided by Him. How does He do this? **Well, this is the blessing of sanctification.** The Spirit renews our minds to know the will of God, and He enables us to do the will of God. He does this with the Scriptures. Col 3:16 tells us to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom. Eph 5:18 paraphrases this as ‘be filled with the Spirit’. The more we are soaked in the Scriptures and yield to His Lordship – the more He fills, guides and leads.

So, in the area of prayer He first conforms our minds to the will of God. He, in conjunction with the Bible and our obedience, reshapes our minds and our desires to want and desire the things of God. Someone asked if you were in a boat, and you cast out a rope to hook the shore – are you then pulling the shore to yourself or your boat to the shore? Well, in the same way, the Spirit causes us to pull our boat to the shore of God’s heart, so that, increasingly we pray the things that please God. This comes back to praying in Jesus’ name. We do not pray as independent free-agents, using this master-key called the name of Jesus. It means we appear before God clothed in Jesus. You could say that we will then pray as He would. Since we are not asking in our own name, we will end up asking for the things He asked for. Our hearts become increasingly knit with the heart of Jesus.

What sort of things did Jesus ask for? John 17 is the record of Christ’s High Priestly prayer. The overwhelming theme is that God would be glorified. You see this in the disciples’ prayer as well. The more we are knit with Jesus, the more we will have all of our requests come back to this theme – that He might be glorified, that’s God-centred prayer. It is as if Jesus has signed his name on your request sheet. What you fill in on that request sheet will be in line with His name – with His character – with His will.

So the Spirit teaches us the heart and mind of God.

“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” (1Co 2:11)

The Spirit can teach us the will of God because He knows it. Likewise, He takes frail prayers and helps them.

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Rom 8:26-27)

God always does His own will, so when we pray His will, our answers are certain:

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”
(1Jo 5:14-15)

So the Spirit gives our prayers power because He prays the very will of God through us, as we learn it in the Word of God. But He also gives our prayers power because He is enabling us to do the will of God – i.e. He is making us holier. And the Bible is clear that a holy life adds power to prayer.

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (Jam 5:16)

A righteous man’s prayers are powerful. Likewise, John echoes this thought in His epistle:

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” (1Jo 3:22)

In the Psalms, David often points to his own blamelessness and holy life as the reason why God delivered him, heard him and answered him. A holy life gives us a clearer understanding of God’s will, and it means that God’s reputation is never in doubt when He helps those who live separated, godly lives. Furthermore, when we live holy lives, we have the blessing of a clean conscience. A conscience that does not accuse us is a great blessing. An accusing conscience makes prayer difficult at best. The writer of Hebrews says:

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb 10:22)

Praying in the Spirit will mean our requests line up with God’s will. It will mean our lives line up with God’s will. He then empowers us to pray as we ought, just as He gives us the clean conscience that empowers boldness and joy as we ask.

We might say – but isn’t the power of our prayers based on their intensity - on our earnestness, our persistence, our fervency? Doesn’t the Bible suggest God answers prayers that are full of passion, and even tears? What about fasting? Isn’t the power of prayer that we become so intense, we even choose to stop eating as we pray? The answer is that all the intensity of our prayers, all the passion and longing and emotion would not move God one bit if we were not His children, if we did not pray in Jesus’ name, and if we did not pray in the Spirit? Millions of people have intense, continual prayers – but because they are not God-centred – they have no power with Him. He does not have to respond at all to people simply because they are intense in their prayers. The power of prayer is God Himself, not the intensity of our prayers. As George Mueller put it – prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance – it is laying hold of His willingness.

So where does the intensity and the fervency and fasting enter in? These are reflections of God’s power, not the source of it. In other words, when our prayers are intense and fervent, they are an expression of the fact that we truly are praying the

will of God, and are gaining the heart of God. To the degree that our hearts are being united with God's is the degree that we will begin to have His very intensity in our prayers. The Psalmist wrote things like:

"Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law." (Psa 119:136)

He had such a passion for the things of God that he wept over disobedience. Likewise we see in:

Hebrews 5:7: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;"

His prayer was heard because He feared i.e. He knew and understood and revered God. So His prayer was just a reflection of His heart. The kind of earnest praying that moves God, does so because your heart is increasingly reflecting His heart and He always does His own will. So the passion and the emotion are expressions of hunger, not the dynamic behind the answer. In other words, our prayers begin to mirror the very heart of God. Our prayers increasingly become God talking to Himself through us.

Trinitarian prayer glorifies God because the Spirit inspires and directs our hearts to pray the will of God; God the Son has purchased for sinners the right and authority to petition God; God the Father hears prayers made in His Son's name according to His own will and is pleased to answer them. This is the power of God-centred prayer – God's Passion for His own glory. God speaking to Himself through us – this is God-centred prayer. Spirit, Son and Father, talking about their own will in the theatre of the human heart. And as we see God's gracious answer, we consciously give Him thanks and praise – which further glorifies Him. Well did Jesus say: Our confidence lies not in the eloquence or even intensity of our prayers – it lies in God's commitment to act according to His will, which He makes known to us, and gives us the authority to ask for.